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Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted: Feb. 2, 2006

'Thou shalt not kill': Why abortion is evil yet still legal

By Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted
The Catholic Sun

Part Three in a Series

The killing of an innocent human being at the very beginning of its life, through abortion or infanticide, is so evil than even a child knows that it is terribly wrong. No person could be more innocent, more defenseless than an unborn child. Yet, in our country since Jan. 22, 1973, there has been no legal protection for the unborn child. Even a partially born child can be killed legally in America!

In the previous part of this series, we considered the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures and of the Church's Tradition asserting that abortion is an unjustifiable murder, or as Vatican II called it "an unspeakable crime." We also looked at how this could have happened in America, a nation that has always prided itself on its eagerness to protect and fight for human rights at home and throughout the world.

At this time, let us consider the reasons for the continuance of abortion in America in 2006.

The twisting of language

Without a doubt, a key reason is the manipulation of language. For example, many use the term "pro-choice" to obscure the reality that abortion kills an innocent human life. The real question is not whether people can choose their own actions, since all people have free will, but rather whether the choices are morally evil or not. As John Paul II said in 1995 in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (#58), "...we need now more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and to call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception."

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When discussing abortion today, and some other hot-button topics as well, perhaps we should begin by declaring, "Thou shalt not twist language." The Prophet Isaiah declares (5:20), "**Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who change darkness into light and light into darkness.**" And Jesus exhorts us (Mt 5:37), "**Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes' and your 'No' mean 'No'. Anything more is from the evil one.**"

Complicity of Guilt

Since there have been well over 45 million abortions in the USA since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, how many millions of people today fear that if they condemned abortion they would implicitly condemn their wives, daughters, sisters, friends, neighbors, associates and so forth? Then, there are all those millions of husbands, boyfriends, parents, doctors and nurses who have actually participated, directly or indirectly, in abortions. Many others are silenced by their guilt, rendered numb by their shame, grieving their mistakes and falsely convinced that they would be hypocrites if they voiced opposition to what their hearts already tell them was terribly wrong.

This complicity of guilt leads all too easily to a denial of responsibility. Physicians and nurses who perform abortions, for example, lay responsibility not on themselves but with the law that permits it or the decision of the mothers coming for abortions. If the law allows abortions, their argument goes, then it is ethically permissible. If women request abortions, then those who perform the abortions are obliged to help them and not to "impose their own morality" on these women. Some, to justify abortion in the eyes of mothers who seek them, say that the "unwanted child" is actually an aggressor in the womb of the woman, even called an "unjust aggressor." But, how could such a completely innocent child be an aggressor?

The alluring 'pro-woman' arguments

A third reason that abortion remains legal in America today is that its proponents have temporarily succeeded in making many think that being pro-abortion amounts to being pro-woman, or that you cannot be pro-child and pro-mother at the same time. They say that women would unduly suffer if unborn children were legally protected. So, if you are compassionate towards women, the argument goes, you must give mothers the right to "terminate their pregnancy" (i.e. kill their children). Although nothing could be farther from the truth, many have been taken in by this argumentation for fear of being labeled anti-woman.

The argumentation here often begins with "rights" language, e.g., "It's my body and I have a right to do with it as I please!" But how could it be good for a woman to help her take the life of her own child? How could such a wrong be a right? Only a society that has lost a sense of motherhood's value could argue for such an absurd atrocity. It is the total contradiction of motherhood. For, in reality, to be pro-child is the essence of being a good mother. It is good for women (and men too) to love their children, to suffer for their children's welfare, even like

Jesus to lay down their life for their children. Sacrifice lies at the core of love.

Suffering's value is forgotten

Some favor abortion nowadays because they see no value whatsoever in suffering. They say that "the termination of pregnancy" relieves a woman of all the suffering that comes with an "unwanted pregnancy," suffering connected with health difficulties or difficult social conditions. These arguments sway many because our popular culture sees suffering as worthless (No wonder the movie "The Passion of Christ" was so controversial!).

These arguments, however, fail to see that suffering is an inevitable part of life in a world darkened by sin, and that suffering can be full of meaning. In addition, they fail to acknowledge the emotional and psychological suffering women face following an abortion. Rather than relieving a woman of suffering, abortion leads to worse suffering: feelings of sadness, guilt and regret. We need to listen today to the nightmares reported by post-abortive women, nightmares that they know are linked to the death of their children.

Imposing your morality on others

Some Catholics and other believers have been frightened into silence and even confused by charges that they are imposing their morality on others, especially when they oppose abortion. It is contended that a person's faith should have no impact on his or her public life. This is the infamous "I am a Catholic but..." syndrome! Of course, if one's faith does not impact on one's whole life, including one's political and social responsibilities, then it is not authentic faith; it is a sham, a counterfeit.

A democratic society needs the active participation of all its citizens, people of faith included. People of faith engage issues on the basis of what they believe, just as atheists engage issues on the basis of what they hold dear; they fight for what they think is right and oppose what they consider wrong. This is not an imposition on other's morality. It is acting with integrity. It is good for society and it is responsible citizenship (Remember that the U.S. Constitution protects the free exercise of religion). Moreover, people of genuine faith strengthen the whole moral fabric of a country, whereas atheism can erode this moral fiber. Look at the social and moral disarray of those countries that until the past decade or so were dominated by atheistic communist ideology.

Do not lose hope

Legalized abortion will not continue forever in America. Only what is built on love and truth can stand the test of time. Abortion is the opposite of both. It directly violates the command of God, "Thou shalt not kill." For this reason, each of us must do our part to hand on the good news of

God's commandments, to stand strong against a culture of death and to build a culture of life. As we do so, let us assist towards healing all women who have had abortions. Let us listen again to John Paul II (*Evangelium Vitae*, # 99):

"I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you His forgiveness and His peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life."

Women who are considering abortion, or those who are post-abortive and are in need of forgiveness and new hope, should contact one of the following agencies. These medical clinics provide low or no-cost medical care, including ultrasounds, prenatal care and physician care to women in crisis pregnancies:

1st Way (Downtown Phoenix): (602) 261-7522

Aid to Women Center (Tempe): (602) 966-1902

Life Choices Women's Clinic (North Phoenix): (602) 305-5100

Maggie's Place now runs two homes in the Valley providing shelter and a welcoming environment to women in crisis pregnancies who want to give their babies and themselves a chance for a new start: (602) 252-2695

Rachel's Vineyard is a spiritual ministry for healing after abortion: Rachel's Vineyard: Mesa: (480) 329-6795; Phoenix: (480) 966-1902 ext. 101; Prescott: (928) 759-0846, (928) 533-2621 or (928) 775-4500; Scottsdale: (623) 551-3667

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